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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2062  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2165  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7820  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0195  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000487

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2017

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SUBJECT: SOUTH KOREA GRADUALLY EXPANDING RELATIONS WITH NATO

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) In a February 9 meeting with visiting EAP/K Andrew Hyde, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade,s (MOFAT) Director of the Security Policy Division, Kim Chang-sik, emphasized that the ROKG sought increased cooperation with NATO but that it would take time to establish the proper internal procedures. Kim said that the U.S.-ROK alliance remained paramount, but it could also form the basis for additional relationships. Seoul was ready to cooperate with international institutions, like NATO, because the ROK shared similar values, such as democracy, market economics and freedom.

¶2. (C) Kim explained that MOFAT in January sent its relevant desk officer to attend a NATO conference at Oberammergau, Germany, and Kim planned to attend a conference in the next few weeks in Switzerland. These were tangible signs of ROKG interest. The ROK was finalizing its letter to SHAPE stating its willingness to transition its forces in Afghanistan under the command of NATO/ISAF. The ROKG was also preparing for National Assembly oversight and completing discussions with the Ministry of National Defense, which, hopefully, would be finished before the Switzerland conference. Kim insisted that this deliberate pace should be viewed as completing required procedures rather than as a hesitation to attending NATO conferences. He asked that poloffs convey to Washington that the ROKG was working on a new relationship with NATO.

¶3. (C) Pol-Mil Chief David Wolff noted that the USG understood that this was a new experience for the ROK. The USG hoped that ROK troops would build good experience working with NATO forces in Afghanistan. The USG supported ROKG efforts that would step-by-step build confidence in a new relationship with NATO. Hyde added that D/FM Shim Yoon-joe during his February visit to Washington probably could expect U/S Burns to talk about NATO. U/S Burns had a deep interest in NATO, an interest that was shared by the Ambassador and those at the highest levels of the State Department and the Defense Department.

¶4. (C) Asked about possible ROK concerns, Kim said that Seoul wanted to know more about NATO's policy consultations. The ROK was unsure about NATO's expansion plans and had heard that there was some disagreement within the EU (sic). Seoul sought more cooperation in training and in inter-operability issues. Cooperation would provide military experience, but it remained important to do this in the proper manner. Kim insisted that China had not come up in ROKG deliberations

about closer cooperation with NATO. Finally, he said, as a smaller power, the ROK's resources were limited, so it could not function as a kind of "world cop." Still, the ROKG would gradually expand the scope of its relationship with NATO.

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